

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

[Home](#) > [Research Program](#) > [Responses to Information Requests](#)

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

3 December 2012

NGA104208.E

Nigeria: The Black Axe confraternity, also known as the Neo-Black Movement of Africa, including their rituals, oaths of secrecy, and use of symbols or particular signs; whether they use force to recruit individuals (2009-November 2012) Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Background

Sources indicate that the Black Axe confraternity is a cult (*Leadership* 27 July 2012; *Vanguard* 27 July 2012; Coventry Cathedral Feb. 2009, 10). According to Coventry Cathedral, a Church of England's place of worship that has existed for over 1,000 years (*ibid.* n.d.) and that has been "extensively involved" in Nigeria since 2002, the Black Axe confraternity and some other cult groups "were formed in the 1980s as tools of the Nigerian military and they in turn formed street cult groups" (*ibid.* Feb. 2009, 6, 10). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. The Neo-Black Movement of Africa (NBM)

Sources state that the Black Axe confraternity is also known as the Neo-Black Movement of Africa (NBM) (*Daily Trust* 3 May 2012; *This Day* 6 Jan. 2012). However, sources indicate that, according to the NBM, they are not the Black Axe confraternity nor are they a secret cult (*Vanguard* 11 Jan. 2012; *The Guardian* 30 Dec. 2009). The Coventry Cathedral states that the Black Axe confraternity is a "splinter group" of the NBM, and indicates that, since 1985, the NBM "sought to dissociate itself from the Black Axe Confraternity's activities" (Feb. 2009, 97-98).

According to the NBM's website, the group was created during the 1977-1978 academic year by nine University of Benin undergraduates who were concerned about the "plight of the Black Man" (NBM n.d.). The NBM website further states that within "a decade of its existence the Movement was operational in most major tertiary institutions in Nigeria," but later withdrew its operations from university campuses in 1994 due to the "wave of violence" at Nigerian universities that started in the late 1980s (*ibid.*). Coventry Cathedral indicates that NBM is not a confraternity and excludes students and fraternity members from its organization (Feb. 2009, 97). According to the NBM, they have "Zones" in most large cities across the world, and their headquarters is located in Benin City, Edo State (NBM n.d.).

Sources indicate that the NBM is legally registered as an organization (*Vanguard* 11 Jan. 2012) with the Corporate Affairs Commission (*Daily Trust* 3 May 2012; Nigeria Daily News 30 Dec. 2009). However, sources point out that Rivers State enacted the *Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law* in 2004 (*Vanguard* 19 Aug. 2007; NDPEHRD Aug. 2004, 3). The Black Axe confraternity and the NBM have been banned under this law (*ibid.*; CODESRIA 2011, 22).

According to the NBM website, their objectives include: "the redirection of all minds towards Black Realism and Determinism" and teaching people discipline of the body and mind, preventing negative images of Black people, conducting research on traditional African religions, and publishing a regular magazine called *Uhuru* (NBM n.d.). The NBM's magazine *Uhuru* used to be called the *Black Axe Magazine* (*ibid.*). According to the website: "the Axeman (a member of the Neo Black Movement) is always expected to talk with Reason, act with Courage and behave with Grace; this has served as our code of conduct" (*ibid.*).

Media sources report that the NBM:

- donated medication to health centres in Uhunmwode local government area of Edo state in March 2010 (*Plus News Pakistan* 31 Mar. 2010);

- organized free medical treatment, including for malaria and blood checks, to 200 people at Kwale West local government area of Delta State in January 2010 (*Vanguard* 4 Jan. 2010); and
- provided money for a sick abandoned baby in Ughelli, Delta state in 2009 (ibid. 24 Sept. 2009).

3. Black Axe Confraternity Recruitment

A 2007 Human Rights Watch report indicated that the Black Axe confraternity forcibly recruits new members (Oct. 2007, 24). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to *Vanguard*, a Lagos-based newspaper, the Edo state Police Public Relations Officer indicated that generally, cult activities are secretive (24 Jan. 2011). Information on rituals, oaths of secrecy, and use of symbols or particular signs of the Black Axe confraternity could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Black Axe Confraternity Cult Violence by State

On 22 September 2008, the Nigerian Ministry of Education indicated that there has been an upsurge of cult-related violence in tertiary institutions across Nigeria (Nigeria 22 Sept. 2008).

4.1 Abuja

The *Daily Trust*, an Abuja-based newspaper, reports that a clash between the Black Axe confraternity and the Vikings confraternity left a student cult member of the University of Abuja injured in 2009 (7 May 2009). *Vanguard* also indicates that in 2009 a University of Abuja Black Axe member was arrested for attempted kidnapping of two ministers for ransom (18 Sept. 2009).

4.2 Delta

Leadership, an Abuja-based newspaper, states that cult activities, including Black Axe confraternity's activities, have reached an "alarming" level in Delta state, and are "surprisingly uninterrupted in the various higher institutions in the state" (27 Oct. 2011). *Leadership* also indicates that rival cults clashed almost daily in January and February 2011, and reports on the death of six people (21 Feb. 2011).

On 11 August 2011, *Vanguard* reported that a clash between the Black Axe confraternity and the Mafite cult resulted in the death of two Delta State University students, with unconfirmed sources indicating that five people were killed.

4.3 Edo State

In Benin City, Edo State, media sources reported on cult wars between the Black Axe confraternity and the Eiyé [also called Eye and Aiye] confraternity which include the following accounts of violence:

- in July 2012, *Leadership* reported that 4 people were killed in 2 days (27 July 2012), while the Lagos-based newspaper the *Guardian* reported that 6 suspected cult members were killed (27 July 2012);
- in January 2012, media sources reported on the death of 8 people (*This Day* 6 Jan 2012; *Vanguard* 11 Jan. 2012);
- in May 2011, *Vanguard* reported that 18 people were killed (26 May 2011);
- in January 2011, *Vanguard* indicated that 10 people were killed (24 Jan. 2011);
- in February 2009, 7 suspected cultists were killed according to *Vanguard* (23 Feb. 2009);
- *Plus News Pakistan* indicated that in February 2009, more than 16 people were reportedly killed, including 2 university students and a prominent businessman (11 Mar. 2010).

Media sources have also reported on cult wars involving the Black Axe confraternity and other cults, including:

- in August 2012, during a clash with the Vikings confraternity at Ambrose Alli University, two students were killed, reportedly after an altercation between a Black Axe member and an anti-cultist student (*PM News* 7 Aug. 2012; PTI 8 Aug. 2012);
- on 22 October 2010, *Vanguard* stated that during a clash with Maphite confraternity in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, 7 people were killed, while police confirmed 3 deaths;
- in March 2010, according to *Plus News Pakistan*, there was a "renewed bloody clash" with Manfile confraternity (11 Mar. 2010);
- in March 2010, *This Day* reported that, in a war with the Markvites, 9 cult members were killed (15 Mar. 2010).

In March 2009, the son of the Chairman of Ovia South West local government council was abducted by people

suspected of being cult members (*The Nation* 16 Mar. 2009; *Vanguard* 12 Mar. 2009), including members of Black Axe (ibid.). The child was released in exchange for ransom (*The Nation* 16 Mar. 2009).

4.4 Ekiti

Media sources indicate that in July 2011, 13 students at the Ekiti State University were wounded during a clash between the Black Axe confraternity and the Aiye confraternity (*Leadership* 7 July 2011; *Daily Trust* 7 July 2011).

4.5 Imo

Media sources report that the principal of Holy Ghost College, Owerri survived an attempted assassination in August 2012 by suspected Black Axe members (*Vanguard* 27 Aug. 2012; *Daily Independent* 27 Aug. 2012).

4.6 Lagos

Vanguard reports on cult wars between the Black Axe and the Eiye confraternities in which "many people" have been killed and "several" have been wounded in March 2012 in Ijanikin, including the death of a 26 year-old who was not a member of any cult group (*Vanguard* 19 Mar. 2012). The newspaper adds that there are "daily killings and maiming of rival members" of Black Axe and Eiye confraternities in this area (ibid.). On 27 July 2011, 3 people were killed during a clash between the Black Axe confraternity and the Eiye confraternity in Ikorodu (*Daily Independent* 1 Aug. 2011; *The Nation* 29 July 2011).

4.7 Nasarawa

The *Daily Trust* reports that a Black Axe confraternity member killed a member of the Vikings cult in September 2011 in Lafia (20 Sept. 2011).

4.8 Ogun

The *Daily Independent*, a Lagos-based newspaper, reports that, in March 2010, in Sagamu, Ogun State, six people were killed in clashes between the Black Axe and Eiye confraternities in a less than a week, including the son of a former council chairman who was reportedly also a cult member (18 Mar. 2010).

5. Treatment of Anti-cultists

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Nigeria, a commission established by the Nigerian government (Nigeria n.d.a) that, among other activities, investigates complaints and provides conflict resolution services (ibid. n.d.b), indicated that the NHRC, which has not conducted "detailed" research on the Black Axe confraternity, has "limited" knowledge of this organization (5 Dec. 2012). However, according to the NHRC, the "observation of facts" indicates that

[a]s a general rule, Black Axe and other cults do not engage in violent activities against those not involved in cult activities. They are however known to attack anti-cult campaigners through clandestine intimidation and physical attacks. (5 Dec. 2012)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

6. Black Axe Confraternity's Connection to Officials

Sources indicate that clashes between the Black Axe and Aiye confraternities in Benin City are related to the sharing of money that has been given to these cults by politicians (*Leadership* 27 July 2012; *Vanguard* 27 July 2012).

According to a January 2011 article by *Vanguard*, cultists have been recruited "as thugs" by politicians during primaries (24 Jan. 2011). *Leadership* newspaper indicates that cults are reportedly supported by people in "high places" such as security agencies (27 Oct. 2011).

7. State Protection

According to the National Universities Commission, the federal government has asked the heads of tertiary institutions to take measures to curb cult violence on campuses, including: sanctioning apprehended student cultists, conducting media sensitization campaigns, creating aggressive public campaigns and increasing advocacy efforts (Nigeria 22 Sept. 2008). Further information on whether this was implemented could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Media sources indicate that police arrested suspects in about ten of the incidents of violence listed in Section 4 (*Daily Trust* 7 May 2009; *Vanguard* 18 Sept. 2009; *Leadership* 21 Feb. 2011; *This Day* 6 Jan. 2012; *Vanguard* 26 May 2011; *ibid.* 24 Jan. 2011; *ibid.* 12 Mar. 2009; *Leadership* 7 July 2011; *Daily Trust* 7 July 2011; *Vanguard* 19 Mar. 2012; *Daily Trust* 20 Sept. 2011). Information on whether some Black Axe members were charged or sentenced for acts of violence could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Leadership indicates that, according to Nigerians living in Delta state, the federal government, the police, and traditional and religious institutions show a "lack of commitment in addressing the underlying causes of cult-related violence" (21 Feb. 2011).

According to the *Vanguard*, the Edo state Police Commissioner said that the federal government is "'doing its best'" to tackle the problem of cult violence in Edo state, "'but there are areas that still need improvement'" (*Vanguard* 24 Jan. 2011). The Edo state Police Commissioner reportedly also said that police are facing a shortage of patrol vehicles, adding that no divisional operational department has more than one police vehicle (*ibid.*).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). 2011. Eghosa E. Osaghae, Augustine Ikelegbe, Omobolaji O. Olarinmoye, and Stephen I. Okhomina. *Youth Militias, Self Determination and Resource Control Struggles in the Niger-delta Region of Nigeria*. CODESRIA Research Report No. 5. <http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/CDP_Nigeria2-2.pdf> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2012]

Coventry Cathedral. February 2009. Stephen Davis. *The Potential for Peace and Reconciliation in the Niger Delta*. <<http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/downloads/publications/35.pdf>> [Accessed 26 Sept. 2012]

_____. N.d. "Our Heartbeat." <<http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/about-us/our-heartbeat.php>> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2012]

Daily Independent [Lagos]. 27 August 2012. Anolu Vincent and Bassey Inyang. "Gunmen Kill Ex-CBN Director, Nwosu, in Owerri." <<http://dailyindependentnig.com/2012/08/gunmen-kill-ex-cbn-director-nwosu-in-owerrri/>> [Accessed 26 Nov. 2012]

_____. 1 August 2011. Emmanuel Nzomiwu and Femi Ogonnikan. "Ten Die, Houses Razed in Enugu Tanker Explosion." (Factiva)

_____. 18 March 2010. Wisdom Patrick, Onoja Audu and Segun Adeleye. "Thirteen Killed in Fresh Jos Violence - Cult Clash Claims Six in Sagamu." (Factiva)

Daily Trust [Abuja]. 3 May 2012. Nurudeen Oyewole. "'21 Cult Groups Infiltrate Secondary Schools'." (Factiva)

_____. 20 September 2011. Hir Joseph. "State Security Services Raid Cultists Hideouts, Arrests 28 Suspects." (Factiva)

_____. 7 July 2011. Doyin Adebusuyi. "Pandemonium at Ekiti Varsity as Cultists Exchange Gunfire." (Factiva)

_____. 7 May 2009. Abubakar Sadiq Isah. "Uniabuja Expels Five Over Cult Activities." (Factiva)

The Guardian [Lagos]. 27 July 2012. Alemma-Ozioruva Aliu and Michael Egbejule. "Six Die in Cult Violence." <http://www.guardiannewsngr.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=93611:six-die-in-edo-cult-violence-&catid=1:national&Itemid=559> [Accessed 23 Nov. 2012]

_____. 30 December 2009. "Nigerian Police Arrest Thirty Suspects Over Recent Violent Clashes." (Factiva)

Human Rights Watch. October 2007. *Criminal Politics. Violence, "Godfathers" and Corruption in Nigeria*. <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/nigeria1007webwcover_0.pdf> [Accessed 25 Sept. 2012]

Leadership [Abuja]. 27 July 2012. Patrick Ochoga. "Six Feared Killed in Renewed Cult War in Edo." (Factiva)

_____. 27 October 2011. Kola Niyi-Eke. "Battling Cultism in Delta." (Factiva)

_____. 7 July 2011. Abiola Alo. "Suspected Cultists Terrorise Ekiti Varsity." (Factiva)

_____. 21 February 2011. Kola Niyi-Eke. "Cultists Kill Pregnant Women, 6 Others." (Factiva)

The Nation [Lagos]. 29 July 2011. Titilayo Banjoko. "Three Killed in Cult's Clash." <<http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/news/13982-three-killed-in-cults%E2%80%99-clash.html>> [Accessed 26 Nov. 2012]

_____. 16 March 2009. Osagie Otor. "Abducted Council Boss's Son Released." <http://www.thenationonlineng.net/archive2/tblnews_Detail.php?id=79721> [Accessed 26 Nov. 2012]

Neo-Black Movement of Africa (NBM). N.d. Chima Oji. "A Brief History of Neo Black Movement of Africa." <<http://nbmarena.org/history.html>> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2012]

Niger Delta Project for Environment, Human Rights and Development (NDPEHRD). August 2004. Small Arms Project. *A Harvest of Guns*. <http://www.nigeriaoilandgasportal.com/photos/343091-harvest_guns.pdf> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2012]

Nigeria. 5 December 2012. National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Correspondence from a representative to the Research Directorate.

_____. 22 September 2008. National Universities Commission. "FGN Steps Up Fight Against Cult-Related Violence in Tertiary Institutions." Monday Bulletin. Vol. 3, No. 37. <http://www.nuc.edu.ng/nucsite/File/Monday%20Bulletin/22nd%20September%202008%20_Compilled_.pdf> [Accessed 27 Sept. 2012]

_____. N.d.a. "The Commission." [Accessed 18 Dec. 2012]

_____. N.d.b. "Activities of the Commission." [Accessed 18 Dec. 2012]

Nigeria Daily News. 30 December 2009. Tunji Omofoye (Osogbo) and Alemma-Ozioruva Aliu. "Police Arrest, Arraign 30 over Violence." <<http://ndn.nigeriadailynews.com/templates/default.aspx?a=21739&template=print-article.htm>> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2012]

Plus News Pakistan. 31 March 2010. "Nigeria: NBM Donates Drugs Worth N1m to Uhumwode LG." (Factiva)

_____. 11 March 2010. "Nigeria: 2 Benin-based Actors Shot Dead." (Factiva)

PM News [Lagos]. 7 August 2012. Jethro Ibileke. "Cult War Leaves 2 Nigerian Students Dead." <<http://pmnewsnigeria.com/2012/08/07/cult-war-leaves-2-nigerian-students-dead/>> [Accessed 4 Oct. 2010]

Press Trust of India (PTI). 8 August 2012. "Two Nigerian Students Killed in Gang Violence." (Factiva)

This Day [Lagos]. 6 January 2012. Adibe Emenyonu. "Eight Killed in Renewed Cult War." (Factiva)

_____. 15 March 2010. Adibe Emenyonu. "Another Bomb Scare in Edo." (Factiva)

Vanguard [Lagos]. 27 August 2012. Chidi Nkwopara. "Cleric Escapes Suspected Assassins Bullets in Owerri." (Factiva)

_____. 27 July 2012. Simon Ebegbulem and Gabriel Enogholase. "Three Killed in Renewed Cult War in Benin." (Factiva)

_____. 19 March 2012. Ifeanyi Okolie. "Police Raid Hideout of Cultists in Lagos." (Factiva)

_____. 11 January 2012. Simon Ebegbulem. "Group Denies Involvement in Cult War." (Factiva)

_____. 11 August 2011. Emma Amaize and Bulou Kosin. "Two Shot Dead as Cultists Clash in Abraka University." (Factiva)

_____. 26 May 2011. Simon Ebegbulem. "Police Parade 31 Suspected Cultists." (Factiva)

_____. 24 January 2011. Simon Ebegbulem. "How Cultists Prepared to Set Benin on Fire." (Factiva)

_____. 22 October 2010. Simon Ebegbulem. "Seven Die in Renewed Cult War in Ambrose Alli Varsity." (Factiva)

_____. 4 January 2010. Festus Ahon. "Group Gives Free Medical Treatment to 200 at Kwale." (Factiva)

_____. 24 September 2009. "Nigeria: Group Aids Abandoned Baby." <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200909250232.html>> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2012]

_____. 18 September 2009. Ise-Oluwa Ige. "Education, Labour Ministers Escape Kidnap Plot." (Factiva)

_____. 12 March 2009. Simon Ebegbulem. "Gunmen Abduct Ovia S-West LG Boss' Son." (Factiva)

_____. 23 February 2009. Patience Ogbodo and Simon Ebegbulem. "Death Toll Rises to 11 in Bauchi Crisis." (Factiva)

_____. 19 August 2007. George Onah. "Rivers Battles 103 Cult Groups - The Genesis of Problem; Solution, by Ex-Militants." <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200708190053.html>> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2012]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following representatives and organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: author of *Secret Cults in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions*; Human Rights and Justice Group

International; lecturer, School of Law, University of Leicester; National Association of Nigerian Students; National Universities Commission; Nigeria – Federal Ministry of Education; professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; ecoi.net; The Jamestown Foundation; Minority Rights Group International; Nigeria – Federal Ministry of Education; United Nations – Integrated Regional Information Network, Refworld; United States Department of State.

[Click here for tips on how to use this search engine.](#)

Date modified: 2013-07-17 [Top of Page](#)